7 January 1973

Dear Harold:

Before I forget it in this collection of odds and ends, I must mention that those small envelopes you're using apparently will carry only 16 cents postage worth of mail without splitting along the top, apparently due only to rough handling. We now have your complete through 50, and there have been three cases recently where the envelope was stuffed to the 24-cent level and arrived split along the top, in one case almost all the way. This particular envelope contained a goodly assortment of your little scraps of paper, and I have had quite a time visualizing what would have happened in the mails if it had split all the way and spilt its contents out before some startled postal clerk. The envelopes are fine and seem to carry 16 cents worth without trouble. But more than that is asking for trouble. I note you already for different reasons have decided to mail oftener, so this should solve the problem.

The bug is still with us too, and after two weeks of it the STM for the first time shows positive signs of emerging from the ache-all-over miseries, congested sinuses and (very bad for an STM) clouded synapses. At times she has had erratic fever and on the whole has pursued an undulant course, feeling fairly human one hour and like the wrath of God the next. However she achieved something of a breakthrough last night, announcing that she actually was tasting her dinner, so we feel encouraged. I still have something of a cold, but it's not bad, and in any case I never had more than a couple of days when I felt incontrovertibly lousy.

Victor Zorza column, Post 27Dec. Seems to me he spells it out pretty well in the second paragraph of the second column where he says that if the Nixon administration is really concerned at the damage done to Kissinger's credibility by press speculation, the remedy is in its own hands -- by reverting to a less warlike position. Where he seems to fail to spell it out is in pursuing the consequences if China and Russia realize fully it's Nixon, not Kissinger, with whom they have to deal, it seems to me.

The Russians conceivably could be fooled by Nixon, but I cannot imagine Chinese like Chou En-lai letting even self-interest lead him into a trap with this man. Certainly the North Vietnamese are not fooled, as evidenced by today's news that they are continuing to evacuate their cities and warning their people that the struggle is likely to continue.

Incidentally, we heard a hint a couple of days ago from a source which has been monitoring radio transmissions in Vietnam that the Chinese commitment may be considerably bigger than many Americans have allowed themselves to think. This was an account of how the Viet Cong were telling their people to get ready for a ceasefire in late October, what to do, etc., and included a statement that if the Americans did not negotiate in good faith and sign a peace settlement they would have not only the Vietnamese people to fight, but the 800 million people of China too. This means an assumption of escalation, with China getting actively into the war, and it seems doubtful the Vietcong would have told their people such a thing irresponsibly.

Bill Oatis: At the time of his arrest in Czechoslovakia it seemed to me it was probable he was not just a newsman, and I've seen nothing since then to make me change my mind. Particularly when he was out here a few years ago -- 1970, I think -- to cover some story and I actually met him. A complete introvert, very queer guy.

No, you did not send us a copy of your Rothblatt/ Mrs. Leonard/ Kinset memo. We've had R pegged since he dashed out to Saigon a few years ago to defend a bunch of green berets who had bumped off a double agent. I talked to him on the phone when he came back. He makes Mel Belli look like a retarded child.

Your note to us dated 31Dec stating your view that there never was any new signal from the North Vietnamese about resuming negotiations. Correct. We've watched that very closely, and all they ever said, from the beginning, was that they would not return to the negotiating table until the bombing was stopped and that then they would deal only on the basis of the October agreement which Nixon had assured them was complete. Nixon's flacks never said outright they had a new signal from Hanoi, but labored mightily to give the impression that they had. A close reading shows they could have been referring to what Hanoi had been saying all along.

In your 30Dec you refer to Gen. Twining's scheme to trap the Chinese into attacking us so we could fall on them with nuclear weapons. I'd suggest Twining was an Air Force general and that this sort of thinking is characteristic of the Air Force, certainly was at that time. No army man would go along if he were in his right mind. And the Navy is almost as bad as the Air Force if you'll recall who engineered the Tonkin Gulf incidents. Both the Navy and the Air Force are great when it comes to dreaming up adventures involving aerial strikes, knowing full well it will be the Army which has to follow up and clean up the mess, leaving room for a final assault wave of Marines to get in on the final glory.

In a 3Jan memo you ask if the Glasshouse Tapes ever has appeared. We haven't heard of it, and I think the Freep would have said something if it had. We'll watch for it.

I've been saving until last your recent remarks about Nixon's intentions. All in all, I'm still unable to see quite how he and his crowd are actively planning for a totalitarian takeover. Certainly they have laid much that looks like groundwork, and they certainly appear to think they are entitled to reap the supposed rewards of totalitarian control, but I fail to see how they are attending to the necessary and essential details that must be taken care of. We have no national police, for one thing. The Army, even the Marines would be hopeless except for a temporary period of martial law. As things stand now, only in a dire national emergency can I visualize a strongarm takeover. That is certainly possible if not probable, depending upon the emergency. And whether they are building up to that is a question, of course, but thus far I haven't seen many of the signs one would expect of highly detailed contingency plans, although some undoubtedly have existed for years.

As for Nixon's current behavior, my strongest impression still is that something went badly wrong in October and that since then he's been improvising, meanwhile wisely avoiding public appearances and quietly sorting out his controls as he conceives of them.

Your perceptive point that nearly all his top crowd are Californians is well taken. Agreed, and the other end of the axis that begins at Madison Avenue winds up on Wilshire Boulevard. This is a bunch of public relations experts, dedicated to the proposition that the end justifies the means. They are strikingly successful up to the point where people begin to catch on. They are even more ruthless and unprincipled than Wall Street ever was, and despite their enormous resources such as virtual control of the media up to a point, when disillusion sets in it will be that much the bitterer. It may not happen, but it could.

Perhaps much depends upon whether you are correct in your belief that neither Nixon nor the military can conceive of any functioning economy other than a war economy. I agree that as now constituted the American economy will have to be deeply reorganized if it is to function without the pump-priming that comes with defense contracts. That does not mean it is impossible, only that some people think it is.

On the whole I am unable to believe seriously that these hardnosed flacks around Nixon are interested in much more than the authority they think they, as supersalesmen, are entitled to. Least of all are they interested in the nitty gritty details of a functioning dictatorship. It would be too much trouble, unwieldy, rigid. They think in terms of fooling people, not in forcing them at the point of a gun. The gun always could be turned against them. I think Huey Long was closer to the reality when he said that if fascism comes, the American people will vote it in, or something to that effect.

Many thanks for all the stuff from the Washington Post. It continues to have considerable material which is omitted by the NY Times and the Chronicle.

The STM, despite her cold, raises a question she finds unanswered in the 12Dec72 clipping of a Washington Star story by Thomas B. Ross for the Chicago Sun-Times Service on "New Watergate Dimension?"

This says a fake passport produced by the CIA for Hunt was being carried by Sturgis at the time of the break-in. It was made out to "Edward Hamilton," which the story notes has the same initials as Hunt. It also says Sturgis never has been identified as a CIA employe although he had extensive contacts.

The indictment, on the other hand, lists Edward J. Hamilton as an alias for BOTH Hunt and Sturgis, and the STM wants to know what goes on here, since the passport found must have had a picture of either Hunt or Sturgis, not one of both. The story does not go into this at all, of course, and the question of whose picture was in the passport for Hamilton would seem to be important.

Ross quotes unnamed investigators as his source. Who were they trying to fool besides Ross ? And to what purpose ?

Best from us both, Jim

jdw